

REVIEW

“The Past and Future of Militant Anti-Capitalist Street Protest in North America,” a discussion at Mess Hall

Marco Torres

THERE WAS A GATHERING of about fifteen people on the evening of December the 13th at Mess Hall, a small artist-run storefront in Rogers Park dedicated to community education and organizing. Organized by the 49th St. Underground and the Industrial Workers of the World, the topic of the event was described as “anti-capitalist street protest,” but the presenter made it clear from the beginning that he was going to talk about the Seattle anti-WTO summit protests of 1999 and their aftermath. He said that he was associated with a Black Bloc, but emphasized that he was not a representative. According to him, less than an organization, a Black Bloc is a strategy, a kind of network of small affinity groups who, by using their own brand of “direct action,” have been attempting to undermine events such as the one in Seattle, or, in another well-publicized example, the G8 summit at Genoa in 2001.

Like the talk given by the presenter, the pamphlet distributed at the meeting, “How to Fight a War?” [1] had at its center the assumption that the “Battle of Seattle” of 1999 had been an unqualified victory for “radical politics” (a term that was used by the presenter and most of the attendees as something with unquestionable value and self-evident meaning.) The Black Bloc strategy had gained currency during these protests, since they provided the most public exposure to their tactic of confrontational, open protest—a tactic of property destruction and rioting. A great amount of nostalgia surrounded the events in Seattle, and the question that the discussion at Mess Hall was meant to address was that of the diminishing impact of “radical politics” in the years since these protests. According to this account, despite the satisfactory results of mobilizations such as the one in Genoa, the “summit hopping” model of anti-globalization protesting had become exhausted. The anti-war movement that followed, in turn, had been taken over by what the presenter described as “Marxists and other authoritarian types.” Since the high point of Seattle, things had gone thus downhill, and a new wave of radicalization was now in order.

The two-hour long open discussion that followed the presentation thus focused primarily on tactics. There were

REVIEW

Jeff Wall: The Return of the Modern?

Laurie Rojas

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHT EXHIBITIONS of the summer of 2007 in Chicago was the Art Institute’s retrospective exhibition on the work of Jeff Wall. This occasion marked the first time that the Art Institute exhibited a solo show of a photographer. Jeff Wall’s large-scale color transparencies, mounted in light boxes, covered the same walls that have previously displayed Rembrandts, Gironets, and Manets. The exhibition provided the opportunity to reconsider the present condition of photography as art.

Predesigned for extensive art historical consumption and critique, Wall’s work is characterized by an extensive use of cinematic, literary, and art historical references. Following Baudelaire’s notion of “painting of modern life” and 19th century pictorial practices, his work is an attempt to redeem the task of modernism through photography. This historically motivated attempt seeks to recover photography from the detour promoted by postmodern art and criticism that emerged in the late 60’s. As a result, Wall works through the possibilities available in the medium of photography as a response to the historical turn against modern art that still exists today under the broad banner of “conceptual art.”

In conceptual art practices that emerged in the 70’s photography lost its specificity as a medium and abandoned its identity as a historical or aesthetic object. Instead, photography began to be treated as a theoretical object, that is, as a means to critique formalism, representation, originality, and, notably, the claims made in favor of the autonomous work of art. This marked a refusal of everything that art practices in the mid 19th century had opened up.

Wall’s earlier photographs, the now canonical *De-stroyed Room*, and *Picture for Women*, demonstrate how his work encapsulates a response to the ‘photographic legacy of conceptual art’ by alluding to a multitude of work in the history of modernism. By 1978–79, Wall reintroduces historical discourse back into art photographic practices through carefully planned and highly staged photographs that recall for example, Eugène Delacroix’s 1827 painting, *Death of Sardanapalus*. By recalling Delacroix’s highly composed history painting, Wall links himself to a long-standing tradition of art concerned with history.

During the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, history painting stood as the dominant form of academic painting. Traditionally, the subjects of history painting would cover ancient mythology, Greco-Roman history, literary and biblical subjects, but in the late 18th century modern historical subjects, current events and figures in contemporary dress, were introduced. Paintings by Jacques-Louis David depicted contemporary events of the French Revolution throughout their immediate unfolding. In the middle of the 19th century, during the rise of modernism, the traditional subjects of the paintings were replaced by commoners mired in their everyday activities. In the work of Eduard Manet, referenced by Wall in *Pictures for Women*, the subjects confront the beholder by returning the gaze, creating an uncomfortable tension between the beholder and the work of art. In this way, the viewer confronted by the expectation of the object is implicated as the subject of the work.

Many of Wall’s photographs carry a resemblance to, or at least an echo of nineteenth-century painting. The imagery in Wall’s 1993 photograph, *Restoration*, is not clearly discernible from afar, and yet by standing a few feet away,

many questions: Is property destruction a good idea? Should this kind of anarchist direct action be allied with trade unions? Should there be a centralized organization for this kind of protest or should it continue be based on affinity groups? The issue that seemed to be present in everyone’s minds but somehow necessarily ignored was the issue of purpose—of determining a goal to these activities. The answer for many in the room, especially those associated with the Black Bloc, was something along the lines that life should be lived as class struggle; that the end-goal of being a “radical” was to cause enough damage so that the “spells cast by corporate hegemony” could be destroyed. It is important to mention that, despite using the verbiage of class struggle—this terminology was not used in the Marxian sense. While for Marx class struggle was the expression of a contradiction in society to be overcome by producing real historical change, for those associated with the Black Bloc, class struggle consisted of a kind of lifestyle. That is, it consisted of a way of living somehow “outside capitalism”—a way of life that constantly gives the finger to those in power in solidarity with those who are oppressed.

Underlying the perspectives on tactics and strategy in this meeting—which was populated by self-avowed anarchists—was the conviction that in spite of the necessity to fundamentally change society, to even think of taking power was out of the question. Throughout the discussion a palpable and irrational fear that any kind of empowerment for an organized movement on the Left would produce horrible ‘hierarchies’ was coupled with a belief that real change in society is ultimately impossible. The stasis to which those associated with the Black Bloc conceded seemed to be the inheritance of a long series of defeats on the Left throughout the 20th century. And this is no wonder: from Russia in ‘17 to China in ‘49 to France in ‘68, the most substantial attempts of the Left to overcome capitalism have produced little but more of the same horror and waste. What the undercurrents of the discussion summed up to was a sense of desperation—a sense of desperation that made the central question in the minds of those in the meeting not “why should we fight this fight?” but instead “how much damage can we make?”

The darkest manifestation of this kind of attitude was that from time to time those involved in a black bloc would bring up the question of whether hurting people would be right or wrong in their struggle. This kind of preparedness for violence was deeply unsettling. It was as if, having run out of options, all that anti-capitalism had before it was not only properly destruction but also, possibly, terror. **IP**

1. “How to Fight a War Pamphlet” online: <http://www.infoshop.org/news/article.php?story=20071026132337858&mode=print>

On the Relationship between Psychoanalysis and Emancipatory Politics:

Castoriadis, Marx, and Freud on Time and Emancipation

Amanda Armstrong

ON TWO OCCASIONS, Sigmund Freud observed that politics, pedagogy, and psychoanalysis are all impossible professions. Cornelius Castoriadis attempted to make sense of this cryptic observation in a 1994 essay entitled “Psychoanalysis and Politics,” in which he argued that, not only are these three “professions” structurally analogous, they are also entangled with each other such that the “impossible” realization of pedagogical or psychoanalytic aims is ultimately conditional upon an emancipatory political transformation.

The impossibility of psychoanalysis as well as of pedagogy lies in the fact that they both attempt to aid in the creation of autonomy for their subjects by using an autonomy that does not yet exist. This appears to be a logical impossibility.... But the impossibility also appears, especially in the case of pedagogy, to lie in the attempt to produce autonomous human beings within a heteronomous society.... The solution to this riddle is the “impossible” task of politics—all the more impossible since it must also lean on a not yet existing autonomy in order to bring its own type of autonomy into being. [1]

Castoriadis’s analysis of the “impossible possibility” of emancipatory politics, while deformed by his tendency to treat dynamic social formations as static states of being (i.e., “autonomy”), conveys, in a partially veiled form, certain important dimensions of Marxist politics. First, by analogizing social emancipation to pedagogy and psychoanalysis, Castoriadis squarely positions social emancipation along a temporal axis, indicating that Marxists should strive to bring about a break, in time, between an era characterized by “personal independence founded on objective dependence.” [2] and a subsequent era characterized by a more thoroughgoing form of social freedom. The essentially temporal (rather than spatial) nature of this hoped-for “break” has often been forgotten on the Left—an amnesia that has had disastrous consequences for the project of social emancipation.

Second, Castoriadis’s paradoxical formulation concerning the (non-)existence of the conditions for social autonomy indicates, albeit in a highly attenuated manner, something significant about the ground upon which a possible socialist future might be built. As Marx argued in the *Grundrisse*, an emancipatory transition to a post-capitalist society would entail the abolition of the value form of social mediation and the freeing up of the social wealth, and human capacities accumulated in alienated form under capitalism [3]. In other words, the social form that currently frustrates social emancipation—namely, capital—would also constitute the ground upon which a socialist society would be built. Thus, in a sense, it is right to say that there is no currently-constituted social basis for emancipation, but that the basis for emancipation can nevertheless be found in contemporary society. Were this not the case, as Marx observed in the *Grundrisse*, “then all attempts to explode [capitalist society] would be quixotic” [4]. As Moishe Postone argues:

The specificity of capitalism’s dialectical dynamic, as analyzed by Marx, entails a relationship of past, present, and future very different from that implied by any linear notion of historical development....In capitalism, objectified historical time is accumulated in alienated form, reinforcing the present, and, as such, it dominates the living. Yet, it also allows for people’s liberation from the present by undermining its necessary moment, thereby making possible the future—the appropriation of history such that the older relations are reversed and transcended. Instead of a social form structured by the present, by abstract

1. Cornelius Castoriadis, *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, Ed. & Trans., David Ames Curtis (Stanford University Press, 1997) 131.
2. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin and New Left Review, 1973) 158.
3. *Ibid.* 704–712; 4. *Ibid.* 159.

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I think one can think of globalized capitalism as a force that is marginalizing many people but not necessarily in terms of their position in the process of production. For instance globalized capitalism creates ecological problems, and you can have people resisting the installation of factories in some areas because of the polluting effects; you can have an imbalance between different sectors of the economy created by international finance. So you are in a society that is creating more and more dislocations through the process of globalization. The theory of Marxism finally is a theory of an increasing homogenization of social structure under capitalism. It said, as a result of capitalist development, the middle classes and the peasantry will disappear, and the end of the conflict of history will be a simple show down between a homogenized working class and the bourgeoisie. But this is not what has happened. What has happened is that there is an increasing heterogeneity in the social structure, but this heterogeneity has not brought about a diffusion of social conflicts. What has been generated is the proliferation of points of rupture in capitalism that as a result has brought to the fore the need of creating a unification through political means of what classical Marxism thought was going to be an automatic result of the development of economic forces. So if you look today at the anti-globalization movement or the alter-globalization movement—you see this proliferation of things. In the meetings in Porto Alegre, you see that there are all kinds of specialized workshops—women’s empowerment, homosexuals in California, anti-institutional groups and so on, each with their particular organization and separate issues. On the other hand, there is the attempt to create themes that circulate among all these different groups, creating some kind of global consciousness. Now this is very different in terms of internationalization than the classic internationalisms of the 19th or 20th century, which were based in the common identity of the worker through the trade union and the parties. Here you have a very heterogeneous social base, but however, some efforts at universalization.

labor time, there can be a social form based upon the full utilization of a history alienated no longer, both for society in general and for the individual. [5]

In a brief footnote attached to this passage, Postone observes:

One could draw a parallel between this understanding of the capitalist social formation’s history and Freud’s notion of individual history, where the past does not appear as such, but, rather, in a veiled, internalized form that dominates the present. The task of psychoanalysis is to unveil the past in such a way that its appropriation becomes possible. The necessary moment of a compulsively repetitive present can thereby be overcome, which allows the individual to move into the future. [6]

With this footnote, we return to the analogy between psychoanalysis and emancipatory politics with which we began. In what follows, I want to try and open up some inroads into thinking through the significance of this analogy—is it merely a coincidence, or can we offer an explanation as to why Freud formulated a theory of individual emancipation that was so strikingly analogous to Marx’s formulation of the relationship between history and emancipation?

One way to make inroads into this comparison of Marx and Freud’s conceptions of time and emancipation is through an examination of Freud’s theorization of the “compulsion to repeat”—a hypothesized compulsion that, in his metapsychological essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud finds evidence for in a number of social and psychological phenomena (from a number of developmental phases and historical eras). He goes so far as to suggest that this “compulsion” might properly be understood as an “urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces” [7]. The paragraph in which this quote is embedded is directly preceded by a discussion of the psychotherapist’s attempt to help their patient overcome a compulsively repeated present, indicating that Freud conceptualized the psychotherapeutic aim of helping a patient move into the future as somehow continuous with, or relevant to, a broader world-historical problem concerning the socially general “death instinct”—a problem that he would explore more extensively in “Civilization and Its Discontents.” Freud’s rapid and under-theorized switching of levels of analysis in these paragraphs, as well as at other points throughout his writings, leads me to hypothesize that Freud partially identified his individual patients with society, and that, in developing his psychoanalytic practice, he was—in part—formulating a veiled model for how society might overcome the “compulsion to repeat” imposed by the value form of social mediation and thus realize the possibilities for human emancipation immanent in the present. Assuming that this explanation of the analogy between psychoanalysis and emancipatory politics is plausible, we (as Left historians) can formulate an ambivalent historical evaluation of Freud: on the one hand, he fostered a conception of the temporal dimension of emancipation at a historical moment during which many Left social theorists were shifting into a spatial frame of reference—a shift that still haunts the Left; on the other hand, by partially identifying individuals with society (instead of—like Marx or Adorno—analyzing the manner in which, under capitalism, the individual mediates society), Freud prepared the ground for Herbert Marcuse and other New Left Freud-Marxists, who replaced social emancipation with a reified “desire” as the desideratum of Left politics. **IP**

5. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) 377.
6. *Ibid.* 377, n. 131.
7. Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” *The Freud Reader*, Ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton and Co., 1989) 612. Emphasis added.

The Failure of Pakistan

A Concise History of the Left

Platypus Historians Group

THE PRESENT-DAY CRISIS in Pakistan resists adequate historicization in favor of pithy news headlines. Yet its concrete expressions include the autocratic state-of-emergency imposed by General Musharraf, the violent rise of Islamic fundamentalism — first in the anarchic north-west, but increasingly also in cities — the over-dependence on economic as well as military assistance from the U.S., the massive expansion of the army into civilian sectors, especially commerce, and the ever growing socioeconomic disparities—in short: the failure of Pakistan. And while, at first blush, it appears that Pakistan was crippled from its origin by indelible contradictions, it is anachronistic to think that the “choice” politically was always between theocratic Islamism or secular despotism. For what this view effaces is that there was once a vital Left in Pakistan. The aim in the brief political history which follows is to argue that the contemporary meltdown in Pakistan is the stark consequence of the cumulative (self-)defeats of the Left.

Pakistan inherited a Left under the ruinous impress of Stalinism. Committed to the theory of revolution in stages, the Comintern under Stalin entreated communists in India to support the creation of Pakistan in 1947, in effect prolonging the policy of the “Popular Front.” The incipient Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) flourished in West Pakistan: its attempts to organize workers under the rubric of the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation were undercut by the state-favored All Pakistan Confederation of Labor which had lined up with the American Federation of Labor; its ranks were further thinned after its hand in plotting a coup d’état, the thwarted Rawalpindi conspiracy, was revealed in 1951. Meanwhile in East Pakistan, the CPP tried a different tack—galvanizing the peasantry. The militant, CPP-backed All Pakistan Kisan Sabha was able to exact modest land reforms that were implemented in East Bengal in 1950, the main effect of which was to drive out Hindu landlords. However, the resolve to arm the

peasantry on the model of the Chinese Revolution marked another volte-face in policy, one that was now in step with the “ultra-Left” blueprint outlined in the first report of the newly formed Cominform. Between 1948–58 there were no parliamentary elections in Pakistan; when regional elections were held in East Pakistan in 1954 as a first step toward enfranchisement, the main party in the west, the Muslim League, was routed by a coalition of Bengali nationalists, the United Front, with succor from the CPP. For its role the CPP was banned in late 1954. On the international front, as India allied itself with U.S.S.R, Pakistan steered toward an anti-Soviet alliance in the Baghdad Pact of 1955. To skirt the authorities, a Leftist umbrella group, the National Awami Party (NAP), was founded in 1957. NAP was expected to be a member of the coalition that was touted to win the national elections scheduled for early 1959 when, in October 1958, General Ayub Khan wrested the reins of the state.

For a decade General Ayub stewarded Pakistan on a state-centric course of development. Between 1955–65, the first “Five-Year” schemes led to increases in the GNP, the rate of industrialization, and total capital imports, but also underlined the limits to the developmentalist model. On the one hand, the influx of capital from the U.S. allowed Pakistan to find its role in the world-market. However, in its effort to build a national economy, the state mandated a series of impediments to capitalization. In addition, the state siphoned off surpluses to fund projects that favored West Pakistan while permitting high unemployment rates and landlessness to fester in the East, which further alienated the discontinguous halves. The Left fueled this sense of difference in counter-intuitive ways after the Sino-Soviet split in 1964. Once “Red” China made overtures toward General Ayub, the Maoists in NAP, based primarily in East Bengal, made strange bedfellows with the military dictatorship. By contrast, the Moscow-aligned Stalinists, who had reservations about the role of the “peasantry,” found

Who Needs the Left?

(Reflections on Joining the Industrial Workers of the World)

Joe Grim Feinberg

IN THE SPRING OF 2006, after years of activity on the Left, I joined the IWW. I joined because it cared little for Leftism. And because it began every meeting with a song.

After years of dodging the crossfire of competing claims to revolutionary truth, I breathed happily at last in meetings where no one tested my position on Cuba or the Green Party or state capitalism vs. deformed workers states. At last: an organization that, instead of building walls around itself, tried to tear down barriers and build “one big union” of all workers, believing that only when we struggle together can we end the system of wage slavery. No party programs, no denunciations of false revolutionaries, only one repeated call: *to organize*. Is it—can it be—enough?

I decided that the problem of the Left is much deeper than its endless quarreling over trifles. I realized: the Left is bad at organizing not only because it is so unpleasant that few people want to be a part of it, but more importantly because its entire structure of being leads it in other directions.

The state of affairs was different in earlier days of the left, when the “international workers movement” was almost synonymous with the movement for “socialism.” Socialism was widely identified as the set of ideas and practices that developed when workers organized and

struggled for change. Intellectuals might synthesize and add nuance to these ideas or suggest changes in these practices, but socialism as a whole was integral to the organized activity of the working class.

A crucial change took place in the twentieth century, when Leftists began to argue that simple “trade union consciousness” was not enough for revolution, and that large social democratic parties could betray the working class even when most of the working class was organized within them. The change was first inspired by the Bolshevik interpretation of the Soviet and German Revolutions, but the new attitude soon spread among anarchists as well as Communists, and later among the young radicals of the New Left. The Left became a sphere of its own, where counter-revolutionary ideas could develop and compete for ascendancy. It became a base where groups of conscious militants could gather to form competing parties or cells, to agitate and show their ideas to the people, to hurl propaganda of words and deeds at capitalism, in hope that the people would follow them when the smoke clears. The Left now acted for the people, but ‘the people’ was now clearly distinct from the Left.

But this in itself is not the trouble. The Left was quite

themselves now opposing the regime by emphasizing the relative backwardness of the East. And, after another disastrous war with India in 1965, the rust on General Ayub’s armor started to show.

Like their French and Latin American counterparts, the student-led demonstrations set into motion in 1968 had a modest start but quickly spread to all the main cities—Karachi, Lahore, Dacca, Peshawar, Multan, Hyderabad, and Jehlum. The call to mass strike from the student Left in December was heeded by workers/trade unionists and segments of the peasantry. After five months the Left had a momentary success: General Ayub was forced to resign in March 1969. Nevertheless, when faced with the task of proclaiming control of the state no Leftist party was in the van. The Left had failed to think beyond the collapse of the regime.

It was in this context that a new social-democratic party, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), surfaced in West Pakistan under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, an ex-minister in the Ayub cabinet, while an older Bengali nationalist party, the Awami League, was revitalized in East Pakistan. Both were bolstered by the incorporation of Leftists who brought with them trained cadres as well as attractive ideology. Pressured further by the growing labor unrest of 1968–69, the interim head-of-state, General Yahya Khan, was forced to hold parliamentary elections in 1970. The outcome of these elections led to war involving India and the secession of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh during which up to three million were killed [a topic which would require much further discussion than can be done here]. For much of the seventies, especially after the world-wide economic collapse of 1972–73 reached Pakistan on the heels of the ruinous Bangladesh War, the nation limped on in spite of the PPP’s slogans: “Food, Clothes, and Shelter” and “Islam is our faith; democracy is our polity; socialism is our economic creed: All power to the people!” Bhutto tried to leave the beleaguered state apparatus including the military but was unable to stem the exodus of either unskilled workers or the middle class, rendering Pakistan largely dependent up to today on remittance from these groups abroad. Bhutto was eventually overthrown and executed.

Developments in Pakistan in the eighties shadowed events more globally. The decimation of the Left in the seventies had culminated with the election of Thatcher in the U.K. and Regan in the U.S., both of whom raised shrill Cold-War rhetoric in the wake of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. General Zia ul-Haq, who had overthrown

Bhutto, tendered Pakistan as an Islamic bulwark. Thus while the C.I.A. trained the *mujahideen* in the mountains, General Zia set about promulgating firebrand Islamism, there was the introduction of Shar’ia courts, interest-free banks, mandatory prayer in schools, and blasphemy was allowed to run rampant. After General Zia’s mysterious helicopter crash in 1988, which popular folklore attributed to U.S./C.I.A. hands, what can only be characterized as neoliberal cronyism set in during the nineties. That is, in the absence of the Left or a middle-class force in civil society, the army, blessed by the clerics, asserted its dominance, including as a capitalist, buying up property and businesses of all kinds. The lack of a progressive Left in Pakistan continues to be felt in the politically opaque milieu after 9/11.

The news from Pakistan has been abject. There were food shortages reported in the markets in Lahore. Eid al-Adha celebrations in rural Sherpao were undone by a suicide attack at the local mosque. Karachi remains terrorized in the run-up to elections by the grave violence of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement loyal to the prevailing regime. And in the capital, Islamabad, the last challenges to the presidency of General Musharraf were smoothed over by a new bench on the Supreme Court. The truth is that there is little to be hopeful about politically; the entire field of actors—Benazir Bhutto’s PPP, Nawaz Sharif’s PML-N, the embattled judiciary led by the ex-chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, or the paucity of Islamists [this includes the Taliban-like Jamaat-i-Islami as well as the softer Islamism of the Tablighi Jamaat and the Tarikh-i-Insaaf led by the ex-cricketer Imran Khan]—is marked by its opportunism. The periphery of Bhutto and Sharif is well-known, as is the threat by groups such as the Jamaat-i-Islami. The sole liberal light appears to be the group of attorneys protesting in the streets (backed up by a small number of human-rights activists). But their battle, while commendable, offers little to build on; their demands mean a return to the corrupt status-quo of what was, replete with its tolerance for Shar’ia. The absence of the Left only heightens the sense that it would take a revolution to secure even modest reforms in Pakistan. Yet there is a certain resignation or possibly even a kind of libidinal satisfaction amongst Pakistanis in the knowledge that the election of whoever may follow General Musharraf will only substitute one form of incompetence with another. **IP**

in strategy, but a change in *perspective*. The task of the left now appeared to me anew: not to ignore the goal of revolution, but to see the goal constituted in a process of social organizing. Not to think up how [other] people should act to change the world, but to place ourselves and our ideas among people who might change the world, and to find the *standpoint* necessary for this change.

The IWW became, for me, such a point on which to stand. It is not the only possible standpoint, and it faces many problems. But what sets the IWW apart from most other organizations is that it organizes *toward* revolution. Beginning from the premise that not all “trade union consciousness” is the same, the IWW develops ways of organizing that can generate revolutionary consciousness: by organizing democratically and autonomously, we feel our collective power, and we come to understand the obstacles that lie ahead.

Democratically: because socialism will come not when Leftists take power, but when people, together, turn leftism into revolution.

And autonomously: because our organization enables us to control our own destiny, however slightly, in ways not fully determined by the structures of capital. Because it is not so much our Leftism that enables us to act democratically and autonomously, but our forms of organization that enable us to be leftists.

And with a song: because a song that brings people together is also an organization. In song, the Industrial Workers of the World develop together our ideas. We look together at the wage system. We build up our fellowship and our resolve. And we strike. **IP**

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the immediate act; it is its own cause and effect. Hence this is a problem of *how* we recognize history in the guise of problems of organizational forms, not simply as a matter of their inevitable obsolescence. Not simply that groups and programmes on the Left have become “dead,” but how and why this has become so, for what they were trying to accomplish has hardly become irrelevant but *remains to be fulfilled*. Such is the only way this history can be made relevant, if at all, to the present. So Platypus asks: What did historical Marxism seek but fail to accomplish that might yet succeed through our efforts?

Hence, the Platypus declaration that “The Left is dead?” is not only a characterization of the present as a place or condition in which we happen to be, but is more importantly a *historical* characterization of the present, a hypothesis and provocation for recognition of what has led to the present and what it might take to lead ourselves out of it. So it is not merely a question of “where” we “are” vs. where we “were,” as *Mayday*, among others, asks, but also and perhaps more importantly “when” we are—and “when” was the historical Left? How can the historical Left, specifically the history of revolutionary Marxism, help us situate ourselves in and despite the historical moment of today?

For we do not live in some timeless and perpetual present of oppression and struggle against it, but in what Benjamin called the “time of the now” (*Jetztzeit*), a time of particular and fleeting possibilities and the ambiguously obscure history that brought them—us—into existence.

The present might not be an opportunity for a break so much as for recovery and reinvention. As Lenin wrote, in the title of his 1901 article that became the basis for *What is to be done?*, “Where to begin?” —Or, *how?* Platypus proceeds now that emancipatory politics is necessarily at a preliminary phase of potential development. Beginning this way gives the history of the Left and questions and problems of our consciousness of it relevance for being able to grasp the very possibility of emancipatory politics today, and what is most essential towards this. **IP**